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## **The Empirical Science Paradigm (ESP) and the Liberal Arts Paradigm (LAP) in Translation Studies**

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Traditionally, approaches in research are divided into two main paradigms. Paradigms are philosophical and theoretical frameworks that provide researchers with ethical norms and rules that reflect what is regarded as "science" or even "good science". Depending on the fields of research, in textbooks, the two paradigms are referred to with different terms like, for example:

- inductive/empirical research – deductive/rationalistic research;
- data-oriented research – hermeneutic research;
- empirically oriented research 'empiricism' – interpretive theoretical research.

In short, empirical research, the main paradigm of natural sciences, is exploration of reality based on data and facts and providing systematic evidence. Non-empirical research, mostly known from the humanities, is regarded as the philosophical and theoretical investigation of texts (but also manifestations of life) – using interpretation, argumentation and rationale.

Scholars from the two camps tend to criticize each other, in social sciences, see for example, Alvesson/Sköldberg (2000), and in Translation Studies, Stolze (2003). What is held against empirical research is that it is a-theoretical and that whatever we observe, it is always influenced by language, selective perception, i.e. a degree of subjectivity, because nobody approaches reality as a *tabula rasa*. The non-empirical, philosophical and theoretical approaches are criticized for being speculative, intuitive and less solid than empirical research.

The terms and the division into the two main paradigms are problematic – not only in Translation Studies, but also in other disciplines like, for example business studies and sociology. Rough divisions like "ESP" and "LAP" (Gile (2005) and "ERP" and "LAP" create generalizations which would need further investigation and support by systematic evidence. What is, for example, the exact extension of the term Liberal Arts Paradigm? Liberal Arts comprise among others hermeneutics, structuralism, constructivism, critical theory, discourse analysis, etc. – all of them with their special research objects, rules and traditions, which by researchers from other paradigms may be regarded as more or less "scientific" and more or less solid.

Having a large group of disciplines under the umbrella of the Liberal Arts Paradigm in mind – can it then be generalized that LAP is less rigorous than empirical scientific research? A look at some of the research skills required in text books in relation to the two main paradigms shows that it is not totally different skills that are asked for in order to do empirical research or hermeneutic research (as an example from the LAP). However, what is most interesting and important in this connection is that Translation Studies of all disciplines absolutely cannot make do without *both* paradigms. Regarding the research skills, see appendix!

## References

Alvesson, M. and Sköldbberg, K. 2000. *Reflexive Methodology*. London. Sage.

Gile, D. 2005. "The liberal arts paradigm and the empirical science paradigm." [www.est-translationstudies.org](http://www.est-translationstudies.org): Research issue January 22.

Gile, D. 2008. "Where is the evidence? On one limitation of the Empirical Research Paradigms." [www.est-translationstudies.org](http://www.est-translationstudies.org): Research issue December 2008.

Stolze, R. 2003. *Hermeneutik und Translation*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.

## Appendix: Research Skills

### Empirical research

- ability to categorize
- ability to listen and to explain
- ability to see relevant data
- ability to see links
- ability to spot new possibilities
- being realistic
- being well read
- being careful
- fresh look
- empathy
- skeptical attitude
- open-mindedness
- patience
- reflectivity
- rigor
- self-criticism
- sensibility
- social interaction
- thoroughness

### Hermeneutics

- ability to ask questions
- ability to check plausibility
- ability to judge
- comprehensiveness
- creativity
- dialectic approach
- empathy
- honesty
- humble activity
- intuition
- logic argumentation
- openness as to different possibilities/positions
- overview
- respect as to the interpreted issue
- seeing relations/patterns
- skill to see alternatives
- thoroughness
- understanding the parts – and the whole
- understanding of meaning